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Guilt and Atonement? Communal Disasters and the Creation of Hero-Cults in Ancient Greece

In Greek Antiquity, communal suffering and misfortune was often interpreted as resulting from divine or supernatural ill-will. In some accounts, it is a wrathful heros who is the cause, and a cult has to be instituted in order to appease him and possibly gain a powerful ally. In this article, I focus on narratives where the hero receiving a cult in this fashion is a historical figure. Specifically, I analyze the different elements of these narratives in regards to how they characterize and frame the hero and his relationship towards his community, focusing especially on the function of the collective disasters and afflictions in these tales.

Keywords: heros, heroization, hero cult, athlete cult, Greek religion, Greek mythology, oracles, loimos

“It is common for some divine sign to foretell, when great ills are meant to befall cities or nations” (φιλέει δέ πως προσημαίνειν, εὖτ’ ἂν μέλλῃ μέγала κακά ἢ πόλι ἢ ἔθνει ἔσεσθαι)¹

Herodotus (6, 27, 1)

There are countless accounts from Greek Antiquity, in which a *polis* struck by disaster resorts to religion in search of the reason which brought about the misfortune, as well as a means to overcome it. Within this broad pattern, there are a number of narratives about such afflic-

¹ Unless noted otherwise, the translations are by the author.

tions being caused by a wrathful dead *heros*,² who has to be appeased through the erection of a cult in his honor. BOEHRINGER (1996: 37) coined this specific type of the Ancient Greek Hero-Cult the “*loimos-heros*”. The term *loimos* (λοιμός), which is usually translated as “plague” or “pestilence”, is very broad and can stand for a wide variety of disasters, which befall a community as a result of divine or supernatural ill-will. The infertility of both humans and livestock, epidemics, droughts, as well as civil strife or military defeats could all be referred to under the name *loimos*.³

The *loimos*-hero concept has been called into question, mainly by CURRIE (2005: 127–128), who argued that in some of the cases in which Boehringer identifies a *loimos* as the motive for a heroization⁴, the grounds on which he does so seem unconvincing. Furthermore, he points out that a legend proclaiming a *loimos* the reason for the creation of a cult is not necessarily an indication that it was also the historical cause.⁵ While I agree with Currie, I would still hold that there is a heuristic merit to applying the *loimos*-hero concept, if the *loimos* is under-

² As per usual when dealing with aspects of the Greek hero-cult, the terminology used in the ancient source material often remains unclear and leaves a lot of room for interpretation. Only in rare cases are the cult subjects singled out as *heroi* (or another epithet indicating heroic status, such as for example κτιστής, σωτήρ or εὐεργέτης) in a direct manner. More often, their heroic or superhuman status is indirectly implied by formulations indicating the hero-like, or sometimes even god-like, honors they receive – in other words: the cult surrounding them. Consequently, the mention of a continuous and official cult in the source material is the primary indicator for speaking of a *heros*, even though the figure in question might not be explicitly referred to as such.

³ PARKER (1996: 257) with references.

⁴ By using the terms “heroization” or “heroized”, I am referring to a dynamic process, over the course of which a figure is turned into a *heros*.

⁵ CURRIE (2005: 128). The example CURRIE gives here is that of Oibotas of Dyme (Paus. 7, 17; 6, 3, 4 and 8). Because his countrymen didn’t pay him any honors after his victory at the sixth Olympiad (756), he cursed them, with the result that no Achaian could win in Olympia. The Achaians eventually lifted the curse by establishing a cult for Oibotas, and they were finally able to win again during the 80th Olympiad (460). CURRIE correctly states that the Achaians (he wrongly speaks of “Argives”, but his argument does still apply) had won several times during this time-span, including a victory in 496 by Pataikos of Dyme – the very same town Oibotas was from –, which curiously is also recounted by Pausanias (5, 9, 1–2).

stood as having a specific narrative function, namely to frame the hero and his relationship towards his worshippers. When perceived in this way, the questions whether a *loimos* directly caused an oracular consultation and subsequent cult-creation or not, and whether it can be considered the historical motive for the heroization, become considerably less important.

In this article, I will focus on cases where the hero-figures, in whose narratives a *loimos* is a central element, were – from a modern understanding – historical individuals. For the most part, this involves athletic victors and (renowned) soldiers, which will form the core of the cases that will be analyzed. A *loimos* also forms a part of several narratives surrounding *oikists*. There, however, the oracular request results in a colonization enterprise rather than the creation of a cult – even though a posthumous founder cult could be instituted later on.⁶ Because of this, the *oikist*-cult will not be part of this analysis, since I will restrict myself to cases where the oracular response advises towards the immediate heroization of an individual.

Within the narratives of the *loimos*-type, the sequence of events leading to the establishment of a hero-cult is often very similar. The overall pattern is largely analogous to the four phases of what TURNER (1995) called “social dramas”: Such dramas start with a violation against the social rules and order (1), which leads to a collective crisis (2). This is followed by a coping-phase (3). In this phase, those members of a community, which are especially interested in the restoration of the *status quo ante* (usually people of high social status, such as officials and priests), look for and initiate coping mechanisms, in order to potentially mend the holes in the social fabric. Such mechanisms could be judicial proceedings or religious means, such as divination or oracles to identify the hidden cause of a social conflict, cleansing or healing rituals, sacrificial rites etc. The social drama either ends with the – oftentimes only temporary – (re)conciliation of the arguing parties (4a), or with the acknowledgement of insurmountable differences (4b) and the subse-

⁶ BERNSTEIN (2004: 32–42) with references.

quent spatial removal of a part (or more) of the former community (e. g. a defeated party or disagreeing minority moving somewhere else).⁷

Applied to the *loimos*-hero structure, these phases would look as follows: mistreatment of the future hero (both during his lifetime or posthumously) or a representation of him by a community, leading to a religious pollution (μίασμα) or curse (ἄγος) (1), followed by a *loimos* (2). This (or alternatively, a miraculous sign) results in the community consulting an oracle shrine (in the vast majority of cases Delphi), which comes up with a diagnosis of the cause and a potential remedy (3). The last phase would be the appeasement of the hero through the institution of a cult in his honor (4a). Phase 4b would be applicable to a number of colonization-narratives, but as mentioned above, this is not my concern here.⁸ It should be noted that this model is only an ideal type, and some of the examples provided in this article do not adhere to this structure, displaying considerable aberrations and different causal chains. Additionally, instead of a *loimos*, we sometimes find a more general disaster or misfortune, which does however serve an identical or at least similar purpose within the story.

As will be seen, the literary accounts in question are an amalgamation of historical and mythical elements and are laden with different *topoi* (reoccurring motives, themes and patterns). It is evident that these narratives are not “historically accurate” in a modern sense – meaning that the information given is matching the factual sequence of events as far as it can be reconstructed by us. The “fact or fiction”-question is a different issue, however. The main question for me is to what extent the analysis of the components of these legends allows for conclusions in regards to underlying belief systems and social values.⁹

I will argue that these narratives should not be seen as “factually historical”, but rather as “structurally historical”, meaning that they do

⁷ TURNER (1995: 11–12; 108–113). For a similar model of the mechanisms behind transgressions of social taboos and their atonement see HERTZ (2007: 273–278 [= conclusion by M. MAUSS]).

⁸ For such a phase model of reoccurring elements in legends concerning Olympic victors see BENTZ-MANN (2001: 232–233). Cf. BOEHRINGER (1996: 40).

⁹ CURRIE (2002: 25); PARKER (1996: 271–272); GEHRKE (2014: 112).

not reflect actual events, but are – precisely because of their overt incorporation of popular folkloristic themes – nevertheless expressive of contemporary experiences. When using the word “experience” in this context, I am referring to how Turner conceptualized the term: an “experience” is incomplete, as long as it has not been “expressed” in some way.¹⁰ It is through this expressive act that meaning is ascribed to experiences. To “experience” thus means “to live through”, “to remember” and to “move forward”.

In this sense, the narratives (as well as the monuments and rituals connected to it) which are part of a hero-cult can be described as performed and re-created experiences, in which meanings are produced and the (original) experience is shaped into an adequate aesthetic form. Heroic narratives thus are dynamic socio-cultural systems, which change their form and meaning over time and reflect collective interests, aims, ideals and ambitions. It is in this way that I think these narrative structures process and negotiate Greek belief systems and practices, and conversely, how analyzing the themes and symbols of these myths is a way to inform us about them. Heroic narratives will therefore be viewed as a “social meta-commentary”, through which a community is telling stories about itself.¹¹ Starting from this understanding, my main point of inquiry will be to ask how these narrative structures, especially the *loimos*-element, reflect and (re)negotiate the role of the hero within the community in which he is worshipped.

The *loimos* and the fallen enemy

The first case studies I will analyze in regards to the heroizing and characterizing function of their narrative elements, in particular the *loimos*-motif, will be taken from a group which Visser called “enemy heroes”.¹² As the name suggests, this hero-type consists of former enemies, who were either killed in battle or afterwards, but were nevertheless worshipped as heroes later on by their former adversaries. Three short examples will suffice to exemplify the overall structure of these tales:

¹⁰ TURNER (1995: 25).

¹¹ TURNER (1995: 30–31).

¹² VISSER (1982: 403).

Phokaian captives at Agylla (a), Onesilus of Salamis (b) and Cimon of Athens (c).

Ad (a): Herodotus (1, 167) relates how the inhabitants of Agylla (Caere in Etruria) stoned Phokaian prisoners of war to death in the aftermath of the Battle of Alalia (c. 535). Following this incident, humans and animals who passed the place became crippled, disfigured or paralyzed. At last, the Agyllaeans sent envoys to Delphi to ask for a possible remedy. The Delphic oracle responded that they should honor the deceased with sacrifices, agonistic events and chariot races (καὶ γὰρ ἐναγίζουσί σφι μεγάλως καὶ ἀγῶνα γυμνικὸν καὶ ἵππικὸν ἐπιστᾶσι), which they perform, according to Herodotus, to (t)his day (τὰ καὶ νῦν οἱ Ἀγυλλαῖι ἔτι ἐπιτελέουσιν).¹³

The aforementioned pattern (unfair treatment of a future hero – or heroes, in this case – resulting in a curse or pollution; *loimos*; crisis and oracular consultation, remedy in the form of the creation of a hero-cult) is very obvious. The Etruscans are depicted as sinners, who violate an unwritten Greek code of conduct by murdering prisoners after the battle was already won.¹⁴ Furthermore, stoning was a particularly disgraceful way of executing someone. It was not a legal or normal method of execution, but an impulsive act of outrage by the populace or a crowd, only permissible when the person executed was guilty without question. The act of stoning could also cause pollution on the part of the executioners.¹⁵ As a result, the guilty Agyllaeans are struck with a *loimos* and are forced to ask for help from a Greek oracle.¹⁶

Ad (b): In 497, Onesilus, brother to the king of Cyprian Salamis, led a revolt against the Persian rule of the island. In the ensuing war, he besieged Amathus, a multicultural city of Greek, Cypriot and Phoenician influence, which had remained loyal to the Persians. When the Persians arrived with a strong force to re-capture the island, Onesilus was killed

¹³ Cf. FARNELL (1921: 362); FONTENROSE (1968: 97–98); VISSER (1982: 404). For a similar tale, see Paus. 8, 23, 6–7.

¹⁴ DUCREY (1968: 289–295).

¹⁵ FEHLING (1974: 59–82); VISSER (1982: 404); Dem. 19, 66 (On the False Embassy); Thuc. 5, 60, 6; Paus. 8, 23, 6; Callim. *Aet.* 187 (Pfeiffer). Conversely, stoning could also be part of a scapegoat-ritual in order to purify a community. Cf. BURKERT (1979: 64–72).

¹⁶ VISSER (1982: 404).

in a pitched battle. The Amathusians then beheaded his corpse and hung the severed head over their city gate. When the head became hollow, a swarm of bees settled in it and filled it with honeycombs. Concerned because of this, the Amathusians consulted an oracle and were told to bury the head and sacrifice to Onesilus annually as to a hero. Then they would be better off (Hdt. 5, 114, 2: ἐμαντεύθη σφι τὴν μὲν κεφαλὴν κατελόντας θάψαι, Ὀνησίλω δὲ θύειν ὡς ἥρωϊ ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος, καὶ σφι ποιεῦσι ταῦτα ἄμεινον συνοίσεσθαι). The Amathusians, Herodotus (5, 115, 1) adds, still observed this practice during his time (Ἀμαθοῦσιοι μὲν νυν ἐποίουν ταῦτα καὶ τὸ μέχρι ἐμεῦ).

This case exhibits a different pattern and can serve to exemplify the limits of the *loimos*-concept: We are not told that the Amathusians suffered on account of their treatment of Onesilus' corpse, although there might be a hint in the oracle's prediction that they would do better in the future if they worshipped him as a hero, possibly implying that they were not doing very well at the time of the oracular consultation. We are, however, left without an explicitly mentioned *loimos* or misfortune. The oracular request is the result of a strange occurrence, namely bees creating a hive within Onesilus' severed head, rather than a *loimos*. What are the implications of this? There is a long and well-documented tradition of connecting the bee to mythology and religious ritual.¹⁷ Essentially, the bee was regarded as a holy creature, which was linked to numerous deities, mostly goddesses. It was associated with chastity and sexual purity, which translated to purity in a religious sense.¹⁸ Therefore, bees settling down in Onesilos' head can be interpreted as a sign that his corpse was not impure like that of regular human beings.¹⁹ This would fit into a *topos* frequently found in hero-myths, namely that the bodily

¹⁷ For a still valid overview on the literary sources see COOK (1895: 1–24). Cf. LAWLER (1954: 103).

¹⁸ PARKER (1996: 77–78; 83); DETIENNE (1974: 56–75). In Semonides' (c. 7th/6th century BC) poem about the different types of women, the bee-woman is the only one characterized in a positive manner. Among other things, it is mentioned that she doesn't like to sit with other women and talk about sex, thereby pointing out her chastity.

¹⁹ BOEHRINGER (1996: 45). Pliny the Elder (NH. 11, 8) mentions that bees won't land on dead flowers or carcasses (*fructibus nullis nocetur. mortuis ne floribus quidem, non modo corporibus, insidunt*).

remains of a *heros* do not behave according to the rules of nature. Heroes quite literally losing their head is a popular motif not just in Greek, but in Indo-European Mythology in general. In such myths, getting one's head cut off is not impairing to the victim's potency and influence. Instead, it affirms or emblemizes the heroic status of the person.²⁰ In addition to their symbolic purity and their function as a marker for heroic qualities in this particular scenario, the coming of the bees could have carried an entirely different and less favorable meaning: In Roman sources, the appearance of a swarm of bees is usually viewed as a disconcerting event, denoting some future evil which is to beset a community.²¹ If we allow ourselves to project this back onto the case at hand, the Amathusians could have been worried about the incident and hence decided to consult an oracle shrine in an attempt to avert a potential calamity. Beheading, just like stoning, was another practice, which was very much against the Greek code of conduct. It was considered low and bestial, something which only barbarians were capable of doing.²² The Amathusians are thus characterized as barbaric and brutal, possibly as a result of their allegiance with the Persian enemy.

Furthermore, it is not stated from whence the people of Amathus received the oracular response. It would be tempting to assume a Delphic oracle, since Delphi is the "usual suspect", especially in cases like these, where the response is about the creation of a hero-cult, and we can even assert a link between the oracle of Delphi and the bees, which are after all the reason for the Amathusians resorting to an oracle.²³ But Herodo-

²⁰ For example, in one version of the Orpheus-myth (Conon, *Narr.* 45), Thracian women dismember the hero's body and throw the different parts into the sea. After this, the land is stricken by a pestilence, and the consulted Delphic oracle orders the interment of the head. A fisherman then finds the still rosy-faced and singing head of Orpheus, which is then laid to rest and receives a cult. In another version (Philostr. *VA* 4, 14), the head washes ashore at Lesbos and begins to spout oracles. Cf. NAGY (1990: 200–202); PFISTER (1974: 516–517); BOEHRINGER (1996: 44–45).

²¹ Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 7, 59–80; Iulius Obsequens 43–44; 70; 72.

²² Hdt. 4, 103; 9, 78–79; Plut. *Per.* 28, 2–3. Cf. VISSER (1982: 405–406).

²³ The Delphians said that the second temple of Apollo had been built by bees of bees-wax and feathers (Paus. 10, 5, 9: δεῦτερα δὲ λέγουσιν οἱ Δελφοὶ γενέσθαι ὑπὸ μελισσῶν τὸν ναὸν ἀπὸ τε τοῦ κηροῦ τῶν μελισσῶν καὶ ἐκ πετρῶν). Pindar (*P.* 4, 60) calls the Pythia the "Delphic bee" (μελίσσας Δελφίδος). Cf. LAWLER (1954: 103).

tus usually does specify when it is indeed Delphi which is being consulted.²⁴ The story of Onesilus is also interesting in the sense that it is not reported in temporarily far removed sources, but already in Herodotus, whose *historíai* are dated around the year 430.

Ad (c): A similar case is that of Cimon of Athens. Cimon died in 449 in the course of besieging Citium, another Cypriot city which had remained loyal to the Persian Empire. As with Onesilus, his death must have come as a relief to the besieged populace of Citium, so it is surprising to find that he was worshipped by them afterwards: Plutarch (*Cim.* 19, 4) – citing Nausicrates the rhetorician, a pupil of Isocrates, as his source – relates that the people of Citium pay honors to a tomb of Cimon, because in a time of pestilence and famine the god had enjoined upon them not to neglect Cimon, but to revere and honor him as a superior being (ἐν λοιμῷ καὶ γῆς ἀφορία τοῦ θεοῦ προστάξαντος αὐτοῖς μὴ ἀμελεῖν Κίμωνος, ἀλλ' ὥς κρείττονα σέβεσθαι καὶ γεραίρειν).²⁵

The phrasing makes it very clear that the misfortunes had befallen the Citiumians because they had not paid Cimon his just reverence. The deceased, in other words, made himself noticed and voiced his displeasure through the *loimos*. Again, it is not made clear which oracle was consulted. The circumstances surrounding Cimon's death are very unusual within *loimos*-narratives. Firstly, killing an enemy was normally not considered polluting, unless it was done under circumstances like the ones recounted in the previous two examples. Secondly, Plutarch (*Cim.* 19, 1) recounts two versions how Cimon met his end: Either of sickness while besieging Citium, or by a wound he received, of which he didn't die immediately, but rather bade those about him to take him to his ship and sail away at once, so as to conceal his death. Either way, it seems like the Citiumians had no way of knowing that Cimon had actually passed away. His corpse was then brought to Athens and laid to rest there, so his body was not theirs to bury either.²⁶ It certainly seems like

²⁴ See Hdt. 6, 27; 4, 150, 2–3; 4, 155, as well as the numerous other examples in this article. Herodotus (5, 42) even mentions an instance where Delphi is surprisingly *not* consulted.

²⁵ VISSER (1982: 406); ROHDE (1991: 178).

²⁶ For an extensive list of “doubled” graves of historical figures, see PFISTER (1974: 230–238).

Parker is in the right when saying that the occurrence of a *loimos* is sometimes “[...] an admonition rather than a punishment”.²⁷

The *loimos*-motif and the cult of athletes

The athlete-cult has been treated extensively²⁸, and it is not my intention here to give a full account and repeat what has already been said. I will thus again limit myself to three case studies – (a) Theagenes of Thasos, (b) Cleomedes of Astypalea and (c) Euthymos of Locri Epizephyrii. I will first give a brief account of the respective legends of these hero-athletes, and then follow it up with a comparative analysis, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition.

(a) Theagenes of Thasos was a multiple Olympic victor (480 in boxing; 476 in pankration).²⁹

According to Pausanias (6, 11), who provides the most detailed version of his life and deeds, the Thasians claimed that Theagenes was not fathered by Timoxenos, who was the local Heracles-priest, but rather that his mother had been visited by an apparition of Heracles. Theagenes showed great strength from early on, for instance, by carrying a bronze statue from the *agora* of Thasos to his home at the age of nine. He later became one of the foremost athletes in Greece, winning numerous victories in the disciplines of boxing and pankration. He also won a long-distance race in Phthia, which he took part in because he wanted to achieve such a victory in the homeland of Achilles, who was said to have been the fastest of heroes. After Theagenes’ death, one of his personal enemies visited his bronze statue every night and flogged it as if he were punishing the athlete himself. One night, however, the statue put an end to this by falling on him and killing him. The statue was then charged for murder and thrown into the sea. Afterwards, the earth

²⁷ PARKER (1996: 272).

²⁸ For a list of heroized athletes and cults with numerous references see CURRIE (2005: 120–123). Other notable works on the hero-athlete include: FARNELL (1921: 361–365); MORETTI (1957); FONTENROSE (1968); VISSER (1982); DOUGHERTY-KURKE (1998); MANN (2001); BENTZ-MANN (2001); CURRIE (2002); LUNT (2009); KURKE (2013a); KURKE (2013b); POLIGNAC (2014).

²⁹ MORETTI (1957: no. 201; 215).

yielded no crop, and in their misery, the Thasians sent envoys to the Delphic Oracle. They were instructed to bring back the exiles, which brought no cure. So, they consulted the oracle again and were told that they had forgotten their “great Theagenes” (Paus. 6, 8, 11: Θεαγένην δ’ ἄμνηστον ἀφήκατε τὸν μέγαν ὑμέων). After this, a fisher caught the statue in his net and the Thasians set it up in its original spot. Pausanias then goes on to say that the Thasians sacrifice to him as to a god (νομίζουσιν ἅτε θεῷ θύειν), and that he knows of many other places, both among Greeks and barbarians, where images of Theagenes have been set up, who receives honors and cures diseases.

(b) Cleomedes of Astypalea was a pugilist who won an Olympic victory in 492.³⁰

Again, Pausanias (6, 9, 6–8) is the main literary source. He relates a story, according to which Cleomedes killed his opponent during a boxing-match. Upon being convicted of foul play by the umpires he was deprived of his winning prize, as a result of which he went mad and returned home. There, he went to a school building, tearing down its roof and thereby killing about sixty children. The populace then tried to stone him to death, but he managed to take refuge in the sanctuary of Athena, where he hid in a chest. When the Astypaleans finally managed to pry the chest open, Cleomedes had vanished. Concerned because of this, they sent to the oracle at Delphi. The response by the Pythia was the following: “Cleomedes of Astypalea is the most recent of heroes; honor him with sacrifices as if he were no longer mortal.” (ὔστατος ἡρώων Κλεομήδης Ἀστυπαλαιεύς, ὃν θυσίαις τιμᾶθ’ ἅτε μηκέτι θνητὸν ἔοντα).³¹ Pausanias ends with saying that the Astypaleans have paid him honors as to a hero (τιμὰς ὡς ἥρωι νέμονται) ever since.

³⁰ MORETTI (1957: no. 174).

³¹ By translating ὔστατος ἡρώων as “most recent of heroes”, I follow FONTENROSE (1968: 74). Others have translated it as “the last of heroes” and went on to deduce that the Delphic Oracle meant to put an end to the creation of hero-cults, which is of course not what happened. Cf. FARNELL (1921: 365); ROHDE (1991: 179–180); PARKE–WORMELL (1956: no. 88); CURRIE (2005: 128).

(c) Euthymos of Locri Epizephyrii³² won the Olympic games in boxing three times (484, 476, 472)³³

Euthymos was said to be the son of the river god Kaikinos. After winning the boxing-event at the 74th Olympiad (484), he didn't manage to win the next time around, because he was beaten by Theagenes. In the following Olympiad, however, he was victorious yet again. Upon his return to Italy, he fought the *heros* of Temesa. This hero was a former member of the crew of Odysseus, who, after they had landed at Temesa, had gotten overly drunk and raped a young girl, as a result of which he had been stoned to death by the locals. After this incident, the *daimon* of the man (ἀνθρώπου τὸν δαίμονα) haunted Temesa, killing everyone he came across. The people of Temesa then planned on moving elsewhere, but the Pythia forbade it, ordering them instead to propitiate the *heros* by building him a *temenos* and a temple, and to give him the most beautiful maiden as a wife each year (ἐκέλευσεν ἰλάσκεσθαι τέμενός τε ἀποτεμομένους οἰκοδομήσασθαι ναόν, δίδοναι δὲ κατὰ ἔτος αὐτῷ γυναιῖκα τῶν ἐν Τεμέσῃ παρθένων τὴν καλλίστην). This they did, and the Temesians did not suffer at the hands of the *daimon* any longer. Euthymos arrived in Temesa just as the maiden was about to be offered to the *heros*. Upon learning what was going on, he entered the temple, saw the maiden, fell in love with her and decided to save her, after she had sworn to become his wife if he would do so. Euthymos then awaited the appearance of the *daimon* and defeated him, whereupon the driven out *heros* disappeared by sinking into the sea. Euthymos himself, after hav-

³² The case of Euthymos is paradigmatic for the omnipresent source problematic in regards to hero-cults: The literary source material is often scattered across several authors. It is unclear whether they recount local oral traditions, or depend on earlier literary works that were lost. It is assumed that Callimachus served as a source for Pausanias, who offers the fullest account of Euthymos' story and is often the prime informant for hero legends and cults of historical individuals. Callimachus used local historians as sources, and Pausanias' written sources include local historians as well, alongside poets. Ultimately, however, it is very rare that a literary source of Pausanias' work can be securely identified, so the question of dating hero legends often remains unsolved. Cf. CURRIE (2002: 27, n. 35; 36). For Pausanias' usage of sources, see VEYNE (1987: 115–123); HABICHT (1998: 96; 142–145).

³³ MORETTI (1957: no. 191; 214; 227).

ing freed the city from the *daimon*, wed the maiden and was said to have reached extreme old age. Pausanias also heard that he had escaped death and had departed from among men in a different fashion.³⁴

Apart from Pausanias' version, there are other accounts, which add variations and additional pieces to the story: Euthymos put his remarkable strength on display from an early age, carrying a large stone, which the Locrians afterwards showed to visitors. His countrymen already honored him with two statues (one in Locri, one in Olympia) during his lifetime. At one point, both of those statues were hit by lightning on the same day, and it was this miracle which prompted the Locrians to consult the oracle at Delphi.³⁵ In the version of Aelian (*VH* 8, 18), the *daimon* is demanding tribute instead of a maiden's virginity. Euthymos then forces him to repay a greater sum than he had received. The author also offers an alternative ending of Euthymos' life. He walks down to the river Kaikinos (the river god who was reputed to be his father), and vanishes, just like the *heros* of Temesa had disappeared in the sea.³⁶

Lastly, Pausanias also mentions a picture he saw: Among other things, it showed a *heroon*, the city of Temesa and the *daimon* whom Euthymos had defeated, "Horribly black in color, and exceedingly dreadful in all his appearance, he had a wolf's skin thrown round him as a garment. The letters on the picture gave his name as Lycas."³⁷

With Theagenes (a), the *loimos*-pattern defined earlier is quite apparent, even though there is an aberration in the sense that it is not himself who is being mistreated, but rather his statue, which serves as his

³⁴ Paus. 6, 6, 4–10.

³⁵ Callim. frag. 98 (Pfeiffer); Strabo 6, 1, 5; Suda s.v. Εὐθυμος.

³⁶ FONTENROSE (1968: 80–81).

³⁷ Paus. 6, 6, 11 (trans. W. H. S. JONES–D. LITT–H. A. ORMEROD): χροάν τε δεινῶς μέλας καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἅπαν ἐς τὰ μάλιστα φοβερός, λύκου δὲ ἀμπίσχeto δέρμα ἐσθῆτα: ἐτίθετο δὲ καὶ ὄνομα Λύκαν τὰ ἐπὶ τῇ γραφῇ γράμματα. Pausanias describes the painting as γραφῆς μίμημα ἀρχαίας, which could either be translated as "a copy of an ancient painting", or "a painting in the old style". Therefore, it does not help to determine its possible age. Cf. MÜLLER (1994: 825). Euthymos apparently was not shown in the painting, since Pausanias, when saying "the ghost that Euthymos cast out" (δαίμων ὄντινα ἐξέβαλεν ὁ Εὐθυμος), is obviously identifying the *daimon* in the painting with the story of Euthymos he just related, rather than describing what is shown in the actual picture. Cf. CURRIE (2002: 28–29).

representation. The case of Cleomedes (b), however, does not follow this structure: Firstly, it is originally not his countrymen who treat him unjustly, but rather the referees at Olympia. Only after he goes mad and kills sixty schoolchildren do the Astypaleans react by trying to stone him. This detail could be important: As mentioned before, stoning was considered particularly ignominious and could have a polluting effect on a community. The legend could thus be interpreted in the way that the Astypaleans had sinned by trying to stone Cleomenes, and were now worried about divine punishment. His subsequent disappearance from the temple of Athena was a sign that the goddess favored him, and it is this miracle, which prompts the people of Astypalea to send envoys to Delphi. Secondly, the *loimos*-element is much less obvious or even lacking.³⁸ Boehringer suggests that the collapsing school was a sign of even worse things to come (a potential *loimos*), as it is in a passage found in Herodotus (6, 27).³⁹ But this still leaves us without an explicit *loimos* in the story at hand. The death of sixty schoolchildren is certainly a disaster, and it is arguable whether it could be considered a *loimos* according to the definition given in the beginning, but that would be stretching an already broad concept even further. Nevertheless, it will become clear from the following points of analysis, that Cleomenes' destruction of a school building, and doing his community great harm in the process, has the same function in the narrative as the *loimos* does in the other cases.

In the case of Euthymos (c), there are two separate storylines, which unite when the athlete, on his way to return to his native Locri, visits the nearby town of Temesa. Euthymos, unlike the other victorious athletes mentioned, does not cause his *polis* misery. Quite the contrary, the Locrians honor him with two statues which were erected already during his lifetime. Instead, we hear of the ghost of another hero, who beleaguers Temesa. This hero has different names in the accounts: Polites, Alybas or just ἄνθρωπος, δαίμον or ἥρωας. The name Alybas is reminiscent of the noun ἀλίβας ("corpse", "dead body"). In addition, in the painting he is described as being black of color, which is befitting of a

³⁸ Cf. CURRIE (2005: 128).

³⁹ BOEHRINGER (1996: 42–43); cf. BOHRINGER (1979: 12).

spectre. This characterizes the dead hero as a βιαιοθάνατος, a dead being enraged because of its violent demise.⁴⁰ The Temesians present the most beautiful maidens to him annually, as an atonement for their crime.⁴¹ There are also two oracular consultations, resulting in two heroizations: The first oracle response orders the Temesians to institute a cult for the wrathful *daimon*. The second time, Delphi is questioned by the Locrians as a result of both statues of Euthymos being miraculously struck by a lightning bolt on the same day.⁴² A lightning strike was as ambivalent as the heroes themselves – it could be a divine consecration or a punishment, with both resulting in the worship of the person who was thus “touched by the god”.⁴³

Statues also play a prominent role in the story of Theagenes: It is the removal of Theagenes’ statue, which causes the *loimos*, and it is its return which provides the cure. One of Theagenes’ feats of strength consists of lifting and carrying a bronze statue to his house, and his statues in Thasos and elsewhere were believed to possess healing properties.⁴⁴ The importance of statues is a common theme in legends surrounding Olympic victors. On the one hand, they are a factor in the conflict between athlete and community – either the statue gets mistreated, or the city denies the victor the erection of one.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the statue is the focal point of the hero-cult.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Cf. Strabo 6, 1, 5 (δολοφονηθέντα [...] γενέσθαι βαρούμηνιν). Cf. VISINTIN (1992: 68; 71; 75; 105); CURRIE (2002: 34).

⁴¹ CURRIE (2002: 30–35) convincingly argues that additionally to his character as a wrathful spectre, the hero of Temesa was also a river deity.

⁴² FONTENROSE (1968: 79).

⁴³ There are a number of examples from Greek Mythology, such as Asclepius, Semele or Kapaneus. Cf. SPEYER (1978: 1123–1125); BOEHRINGER (1996: 45).

⁴⁴ There are several accounts about the potential of statues to perform healing-wonders: Lucian mentions that the statue of Theagenes at Thasos and that of Polydamas of Skotussa at Olympia were said to cure fever (Luc. *Deor. conc.* 12: ἤδη καὶ ὁ Πολυδάμαντος τοῦ ἀθλητοῦ ἀνδριᾶς ἰᾶται τοὺς πυρέττοντας ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ καὶ ὁ Θεαγένους ἐν Θάσῳ). According to Athenagoras (*Leg.* 26), the statues of Proteus at Parion, as well as that of Neryllinos at Ilion (probably a contemporary of Athenagoras), worked healing wonders. Cf. FARNELL (1921: 425); KOSKENNIEMI (1994: 216).

⁴⁵ Such is the case in the Oibotas-legend (Cf. Paus. 7, 17, 13–14).

⁴⁶ BENTZ-MANN (2001: 233).

Another striking characteristic in the three examples given are the similarities and references to tales of mythical gods and heroes, particularly Heracles: Theagenes is rumored to be the son of Heracles, whereas his human father is the Thasian priest of Heracles. Furthermore, the incredible strength he displays from early childhood onwards, as well as his Olympic victories all bring him into vicinity of the god/hero. Additionally, we learn that Theagenes' ambition made him take part in a race in order to rival Achilles.⁴⁷

The parallels of the Euthymos-myth to that of Heracles are equally striking: the prodigious feats of strength as a youth. The tale of Euthymos, being a visitor, challenging and defeating an immortal demon in combat in order to rescue a local woman is similar to that of Heracles and Alkestis. In Euripides' *Alkestis*, Heracles wrestles Thanatos, and Aelian (*VH* 8, 18) uses the verb διηγώνισατο for the combat between Euthymos and the Heros of Temesa, which also refers to an athletic contest.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Euthymos was believed to be the son of the river god Kaikinos.

Cleomedes' madness and his murder of innocent children as a consequence, as well as his miraculous disappearance instead of a regular death are further parallels. Heracles went mad and killed his own offspring, and upon his death on mount Oita, he was translocated to the realm of the gods. His friends found no bones among the ashes of his funeral pyre. Afterwards, he was immediately worshipped as a hero, and several oracles, including Delphi, proclaimed him a god and ordained his worship.⁴⁹

Both the importance of the statues of an athlete, as well as their closeness to heroes and divinities, are reflected in the archaeological material:

The heroization of Theagenes is the best-documented hero-cult for an athlete. Among other findings, excavators came upon two bases of

⁴⁷ FARNELL (1921: 365); LUNT (2009: 383).

⁴⁸ FONTENROSE (1968: 81). It could also be compared to other Heracleian tales, such as Heracles and Hesione at Troy (Diod. 4, 42; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2, 5, 9).

⁴⁹ FONTENROSE (1968: 86); LUNT (2009: 384); Apollod. *Bibl.* 2, 6, 1–3; 7, 7; Diod. 4, 31; 37, 5–39, 4.

statues for Theagenes – one at Delphi, one at Olympia. There is also evidence for a statue and a cult-place on the *agora* of Thasos. Furthermore, a spot with a bench excavation has been suspected to be a *heroon*. Next to a thick layer of ash, excavators found a metal ring on the lower bench (for tying up animals?), which could point towards regularly conducted animal sacrifices.⁵⁰ Furthermore, a small stone treasury or deposit box bearing two inscriptions was uncovered at the site. The inscriptions, dating to the late first century BC and the first century AD respectively, regulate monetary offerings to the athlete and promise good fortune to the donor and his family. There is also other epigraphic material for Theagenes, namely three inscriptions, which list his many Panhellenic victories (found at Thasos, Olympia and Delphi). The inscriptions, as well as the statue base at Thasos, are dated to the early fourth century BC. The inscription from Delphi, which is the most complete of the three, highlights the gap between Theagenes and ordinary mortals by announcing his victories to “those on earth” (*epichthonion*).⁵¹

Theagenes’ victories came in the first half of the 5th century BC (c. 490–470), so it seems that there was a distance of at least a little under a century until an elaborate cult was instituted for Theagenes at the center of his native *polis*.⁵² This cult was then practiced well into the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

The archaeological evidence for the Euthymos-cult consists of the base of a statue at Olympia, whose inscription states that Euthymos himself set up the statue for “mortals to observe” (βροτοῖς ἑσοῦσιν), implying that he belonged to a different race.⁵³ Also, five clay herms dedicated to Euthymos were discovered, all but one stemming from a sanctuary of the Nymphs at Locri Epizephyrii.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ POUILLOUX (1954: 62–64); MARTIN (1940/41: 163–165); SALVIAT (1956: 147–149); CHAMOIX (1979: 143–145); BENTZ-MANN (2001: 233–235).

⁵¹ LUNT (2009: 383–384).

⁵² POUILLOUX (1994: 206) is of the opinion that it took “one or two centuries” (un ou deux siècles) before Theagenes was recognized and worshipped as a healing divinity.

⁵³ Both MORETTI (1953: no. 13) and EBERT (1972: no. 16) date the inscription to around 470, shortly after Euthymos’ victories.

⁵⁴ LUNT (2009: 382); CURRIE (2002: 29). One was found in the Locrian *apoikia* of Medma. Cf. COSTABILE (1991: 195–238).

The herms show a bull with the horned head of a young man standing on a pedestal. From the inscription on said platform (Εὐθύμου ἱερά), it seems clear that the theriomorphic figure must be a representation of Euthymos.⁵⁵ Because of this positioning of the bull-man, it has been suggested that the herms thus were referring to an actual free-standing statue of Euthymos. Additionally, the herms also show an altar and a basin as well as a small knife next to the bull, which point towards sacrificial offerings. Euthymos being portrayed in a tauromorphic manner brings him into the vicinity of river gods, most notably Acheloos, for whom such depictions are typical.⁵⁶ This correlates nicely with the legends surrounding him, where instead of dying, he disappears into the waters of the river Kaikinos, who is also said to be his father.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the nymphs, in whose sanctuary at Locri most herms were found, are an important detail. Three nymph-heads are depicted at the top of each herm. Two other clay herms of slightly earlier date, which were found in the same location, show Acheloos in the form of a bull with an adult and bearded man's face with horns, standing at a *louterion* (water basin).⁵⁸ The nymphs and the *louterion* can be seen as pointing toward prenuptial rites, such as the bridal bath and the beautification of the bride. It seems therefore that the figure of Euthymos, presumably in his river-god aspect, played a role in such rites at Locri. Again, we can draw a comparison to the Euthymos legend: Pausanias (6, 6, 10) recounts how Euthymos marries the maiden he rescues from Temesa.⁵⁹ River gods acting as deliverers of young maidens from impending danger is a theme found in other myths as well. The most

⁵⁵ COSTABILE (1991: 209).

⁵⁶ WEIß (1988: 139–148). Soph. *Trach.* 9–17 (trans. R. TORRANCE): “My suitor was the river Achelóüs, / who took three forms to ask me of my father: / a rambling bull once – then a writhing snake / of gleaming colors – then again a man with ox-like face” (μνηστήρ γὰρ ἦν μοι ποταμός, Ἀχελῶον λέγω, / ὅς μ’ ἐν τρισὶν μορφαῖσιν ἐξήτει πατρός, / φοιτῶν ἐναργῆς ταῦρος, ἄλλοτ’ αἰόλος / δράκων ἐλικτός, ἄλλοτ’ ἀνδρείω κύτει / βούπρωρος). For the overlap between heroes and river gods, see CURRIE (2002: 33–34) with references.

⁵⁷ Ael. *VH* 8, 18; Paus. 6, 6, 4 and 10.

⁵⁸ COSTABILE (1991: 223, figs. 349–350); ARIAS (1987: 3–8).

⁵⁹ CURRIE (2002: 29–30).

prominent one is probably that of Daphne, who is saved from the frantic advances of the god Apollo by being turned into a laurel tree by her father, the river god Peneios.⁶⁰ Building on this, Euthymos could have been regarded as a protector of young women and brides-to-be.

Another example, in which the archaeological evidence can be compared to an athlete's legend is Polydamas of Skotussa, who won an Olympic crown in the discipline of pankration in 408. He was said to have wandered around the flanks of mount Olympus in search of a lion to kill barehanded, in order to emulate Heracles (Paus. 6, 5, 5).⁶¹ Archaeologists found a portion of the statue base of Polydamas at Olympia, dating to the fourth century. It shows the lower part of a relief, on which Polydamas is grappling with a lion.⁶²

What becomes clear is the interrelatedness of the narratives surrounding a hero and the characteristics of his cult. But the process of heroization and their comparison to legendary heroes did not start after an athlete was already dead. As the abovementioned statue-basis of Euthymos indicates, and as CURRIE (2005: *passim*) has shown by analyzing Pindar's odes, an athlete and his supporters could actively propagate a victor's heroic status already in his lifetime:

Pindar, whose odes were composed in the late sixth and early fifth century, often juxtaposes the feats of a victorious athlete with the achievements of mythical heroes. In this context, it is important to note that these odes were often remittance works, ordered and paid for by the very champion who was celebrated in and by the ode.⁶³ In addition, athletes were associated with Heracles by means of a particular victory song called *kallinikos*. This song, in which Heracles was addressed as *Kallinikos* ("glorious victor") three times, was sung in honor of an Olympic champion by those accompanying or welcoming him. It was not itself an *epinikian* ode, but rather a hymn to Heracles that was sung before an actual ode dedicated to the victorious athlete could be prepared.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ov. *Met.* 1, 540–551.

⁶¹ BENTZ-MANN (2001: 229–30); FONTENROSE (1968: 87).

⁶² MARANTI (1999: 102–103); LUNT (2009: 381).

⁶³ GEHRKE (2014: 23); KÖHNKEN (1971: *passim*); LUNT (2009: 386).

⁶⁴ Pind. O. 9, 1–4 (with scholion); Archil. frag. 119 and 324; LAWLER (1948: 254); LUNT (2009: 386).

To sum up, heroizations of historical athletes were dynamic processes between the athletic champions and their respective communities, which started already during an athlete's lifetime and continued throughout the duration of his cult.⁶⁵ While it is clear that Olympic victories alone did not suffice for receiving cultic honors,⁶⁶ there can be no question that they bore significant potential for a future heroization. It is striking that those Olympic champions who did receive a cult, achieved their wins mostly in combat-sport disciplines – Cleomedes and Euthymos were boxers, Theagenes was a pugilist and pankrationist, Polydamas was a pankrationist.⁶⁷ Athletic sports, and especially combat sports, with their physicality and nudity, were the most direct way to prove one's physical prowess and superiority. Impressive victories in such events naturally brought the victorious athletes closer to legendary heroes, especially Heracles, who was the archetype of the hero-athlete – after all, he was the legendary founder of the Olympic games, had won the first contest and three times overall. Consequently, the Heracles-legend functioned as the primary blueprint for the legends surrounding heroized athletes.⁶⁸ Historical figures were thus transformed – and did their best to transform themselves – into legendary heroes. Their actual deeds were reshaped alongside legendary models, and they were credited with imaginary feats and deeds, which were added to their illustrious biography.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ LUNT (2009: 385).

⁶⁶ For example, famous athletes like Milon of Croton (Paus. 6, 14, 6-7; Diod. 12, 9, 5-6), of whom many legendary tales were told, Astylos of Croton (Diod. 11, 1, 2) or Glaucus of Carystus (Paus. 6, 9-10; Aischin. 3, 190), seem to have received no cult. Cf. BENTZ-MANN (2001: 238-239).

⁶⁷ Other examples could be added: Euthykses won the pentathlon, of which wrestling was one discipline. See Call. frag. 84-85; MORETTI (1957: no. 180). CURRIE (2005: 121). Diognetos of Crete was a pugilist. Cf. MORETTI (1957: no. 181); FONTENROSE (1968: 89). Hipposthenes of Sparta was a wrestler. See Paus. 3, 15, 5-7; BOEHRINGER (1996: 56).

⁶⁸ It was of course not just athletes who modelled themselves after Heracles. He served as the paradigm for numerous historical figures throughout Greek and Roman history who were striving for immortality. The literature on this subject is vast. For a number of key works, see CURRIE (2002: 37) with references.

⁶⁹ FONTENROSE (1968: 87); BENTZ-MANN (2001: 228).

However, the question remains why athletes are portrayed in such a conflicting and oftentimes negative manner in the legends at hand – with the *loimoi* and misfortunes they cause being the most striking examples? Firstly, the models after which an athlete's narrative were shaped, such as the legends of Heracles and Achilles, also featured problematic episodes, which showed a hero's temper and volatile nature. As shown, Cleomedes of Astypalea does not just resemble Heracles in terms of valor and strength, but shares incidents of madness and murder with him as well. I find it safe to assume that the *loimos*-element, which is the most striking example of a hero's destructive potential, was added to the narratives surrounding an athlete posthumously. Disaster usually strikes after a hero has already died within the frame of the stories.⁷⁰ Secondly, most of the athletic champions that received a cult achieved their Panhellenic victories in the fifth century, and their characterization within the narratives reflects the social standing of the athlete during that time-period.

Athletes were very ambivalent figures when it comes to their relation to their *polis*. On the one hand, successful athletes could become identification figures and role models for their respective communities. They were representatives of their home state, and the close connection between athlete and *polis* is evidenced by the many inscriptions on the bases of athlete-statues or other votive offerings: The victors are always mentioned by name, patronym, the discipline in which they won and the name of their *polis*. In addition, the name of the *polis* was called out by the heralds during the ceremonies when the victor was crowned.⁷¹ As a result, victorious athletes enhanced the collective prestige of a *polis* and strengthened the feelings of national identity and solidarity among the citizens of their home state. The honors, which were normally bestowed on returning victors, can thus be seen as a form of reciprocity for the benefits the *polis* had reaped from the athletic feat.⁷² Athletic success and glory (*kleos*) could also be instrumentalized politically, and there are

⁷⁰ Cf. CURRIE (2005: 128).

⁷¹ MANN (2001: 34). For a collection of the epigraphical material, see MORETTI (1953) and EBERT (1972).

⁷² MANN (2001: 30–36).

many examples of athletic champions who enjoyed a successful military or political career after their victory.⁷³

On the other hand, athletic activity and agonistic ethos had belonged to the “leisure class” of Archaic aristocracy, and it was something that stood against the priority of the community over the individual, the key ideology of the *polis*. Even if the *polis* profited from an Olympic victory, athletics was something inherently individualistic, and nowhere was the individualism and competitiveness of the aristocracy quite as strongly on display as in sports. There was, in the simplest terms, a tension between conformity and the pursuit of (individual) prestige and glory. In Archaic and early Classical times, participation in the Panhellenic games was almost exclusively an aristocratic privilege. It is only at the turn from the 5th to the 4th century that athletes of a different and less privileged social background start to appear. This was largely due to the amounts of time and money an athlete had to have at his disposal for the extensive training, and of course the travelling which the participation in athletic contests required.⁷⁴

Taking part in a prestigious sporting event, and especially winning it, was – much like today – just as much athletics as it was politics. The stakes in this political game were especially high in the 5th century, where the friction between the aristocratic ethics of an individual pursuit of glory, and the subordination of individual interests into the collective was at its height.⁷⁵ This ambiguous standing of athletes is mirrored by the conflict-laden nature of the legends surrounding them.

⁷³ After his athletic career, Theagenes engaged in politics and became a reformer in his native *polis*. Cf. EBERT (1972: 121). Other examples of the political potential of Olympic victories would be Dorieus of Rhodes (Thuc. 3,8,1; 8,35,1; 84,2), Cylon of Athens (Thuc. 1, 126, 3–5) or Alcibiades of Athens (Thuc. 6, 16, 2–3).

⁷⁴ MANN (2001: 36); BILINSKI (1961: 73–75); BILINSKI (1990); PLEKET (1974: 62–64); EBERT (1980: 73–75). The first document, which tells us about a *polis* paying for the training- and travel-expenses of an athlete is dated to around the year 300. See ROBERT (1967: 28–30).

⁷⁵ Nowhere is this dualism more apparent than in the accusations brought forth by Nicias and the retort given by Alcibiades in their respective speeches in front of the assembly on the eve of the Athenian Sicilian expedition (415–413). Cf. Thuc. 6, 12, 2; 6, 16, 1–3.

The zenith of heroizations of athletes in the 5th century coincides with the development of the genre of the *epinikion*, which had its beginning in the 6th century, reached its peak in the first half of the 5th century in the form of the works of Pindar and Bacchylides, and found its conclusion in the victory ode of Euripides for Alcibiades in the year 416.⁷⁶ *Epinikian* poetry was one way of negotiating with one's community, to defuse the tension that a victorious athlete's prestige and elevated status had caused. Pindar seems to have been keenly aware of the extraordinary status of an athletic victor, and the precarious standing within the *polis* which was a by-product of it:⁷⁷

"Five Isthmian victories lead my song forward, and one outstanding triumph at Zeus' Olympian games, and two from Cirrha [= Delphi] – yours, Megacles, and your ancestors'. I rejoice at this new success; but I grieve that fine deeds are repaid with envy."⁷⁸

It is important to note that Megacles – to whose Pythian victory in the chariot race-event in the year 486 this ode was dedicated – had been ostracized earlier that same year. Therefore, I think it is not the envy of the gods – which is a very frequent theme in Herodotus' work, as well as in Greek tragedy – which Pindar is referring to, but that of the *demos* towards the behaviour and elitist morale of the aristocracy.

Conclusion

The case studies I provided display how heroized historical figures were continuously shaped and reshaped along the lines of a "mythical coordinate system" within the narratives that were created around them.⁷⁹ Pre-existing patterns and *topoi* within Greek mythology were adopted and connected to a historical individual's biography, thereby de-personalizing said person – meaning that their life story was gradually

⁷⁶ GOLDEN (1998: 76–78) with references; DOUGHERTY–KURKE (1998: 131–133).

⁷⁷ KURKE (2013b: 257–262); LUNT (2009: 386).

⁷⁸ Pind. *P.* 7, 13–19 (trans. D. A. SVARLIEN): ἄγοντι δέ με πέντε μὲν Ἴσθμοι / νῖκαι, μία δ' ἐκπρεπῆς / Διὸς Ὀλυμπιάς, / δύο δ' ἀπὸ Κίρρας, / ὦ Μεγάκλεες, / ὑμαί τε καὶ προγόνων. / νέα δ' εὐπραγία χαίρω τι: τὸ δ' ἄχνημαι, / φθόνον ἀμειβόμενον τὰ καλὰ ἔργα.

⁷⁹ Cf. BENTZ–MANN (2001: 228).

supplanted by, and assimilated to, that of legendary heroes like Heracles or Achilles – while simultaneously elevating them to a heroic status. As we have seen, athletes could initiate and participate in this process actively during their lifetime.

Different forms of media were used to frame and spread these narratives, such as statues, paintings, inscriptions or victory odes and songs. Furthermore, it is evident that they reflect certain views, notions and socio-political realities and experiences of the societies which created them and handed them down.⁸⁰

Overall, heroic narratives surrounding historical figures seem to have served four interconnected purposes:

- a. Providing an aetiological narrative for a specific hero-cult
- b. Affirming the heroic status of the cult-subject (through the attribution of heroic qualities – both productive and destructive)
- c. Defining the role of a *heros* and his cult within a set community
- d. Educational and/or pedagogical transmission of social values, norms and ideals

By being removed from their human existence and transposed to the realm of gods and heroes, historical figures inherited likewise powers. They could work healing wonders and were helpers in battle.⁸¹ Conversely, they also share their less amicable traits, and are generally portrayed as easy to anger, brutal and vindictive. As we have seen, a dead hero is a mighty being who demands worship and can cause great harm if neglected or slighted.⁸²

In this sense, Greek heroes are the embodiment of the ambiguous nature of the “Sacred” as conceptualized by the Durkheim-school and the Collège de Sociologie: The world of the Sacred can be thought of as the realm of energies and forces, as opposed to the Profane – the world of substances and things. A “thing” is something solid and stable, whereas a force can have good or bad effects, depending on the circum-

⁸⁰ Cf. HÜBNER (1985: 64–66; 84).

⁸¹ For example, Oibotas of Dyme was said to have fought in the Greek ranks at Plataia (479). Cf. Paus. (6, 3, 8).

⁸² BURKERT (2011: 311); PARKER (1996: 272–273).

stances. This force is not good or bad in its essence (“good” or “bad” are hereby not conceived as ethical antagonisms, but as the two poles within the realm of the Sacred), but in the direction it takes or in which someone is trying to channel it within a specific act. Because of its potency and volatility, the Sacred evokes desire and fear at the same time. It can be a source both of immense blessing and great affliction.⁸³

In my opinion, this twofold potential is nowhere more apparent than in the case of the *loimos-heros*. A *loimos* or collective misfortune caused by a supernatural being represents the most striking example for the destructive potential of the Sacred. It highlights a hero’s potency and serves as a reminder and incentive to grant him the worship he is demanding.⁸⁴

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⁸³ CAILLOIS (2012: 321–322).

⁸⁴ Cf. LUNT (2009: 385).

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